Kuykendall shared memories of 'Retreat' with genealogy society

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REESES MILL – Mike Kuykendall spent his entire life in Reeses Mill farming the land that's been in his family for centuries.

Kuykendall recently shared his memories with members of the Mineral County Genealogy Society.

His father Robert Kuykendall was born at Rebel's Retreat in 1883.

Known as a meeting place for the south during the Civil War, Rebel's Retreat lies on the Patterson Creek Road off Route 46. It was a "no man's land" during the war with no battles recorded in the immediate area between Keyser and Romney.

This 999-acre farm along with the Johnson farm extended through Reeses Mill almost to Minco Park and out the present day Route 46 to the area of the Baptist Church.

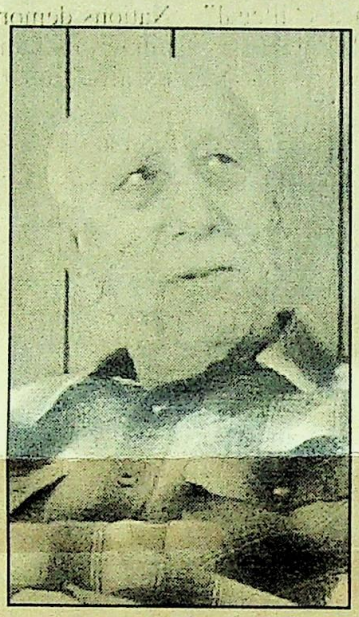
Abraham Johnson was the first man to settle in what is now Mineral County. He settled in the area before George Washington surveyed it. Kuykendall's grandmother was a Johnson and his ancestors have lived on the local farms since 1748.

One stone in the Johnson Cemetery marks the graves of three Johnson couples. Other family members are buried in the Greenville Cemetery, named after Greenville Johnson and located about one mile from Headsville.

Members of the Reese family married into the Johnson family and in later years the Reeses built the local mill, providing the name for the rural community.

Reeses Mill had a post office where residents picked up their mail prior to the start of rural delivery in the early 1930s.

The community also had its own school. The first school stood in the area of Minco Park, while the second school was at the intersection at Reeses Mill. The former building was changed to the Reeses Mill Community Building following school consolidation in 1933.



Mike Kuykendall

"We always had good teachers," said Kuykendall. He only had four teachers at Reeses Mill School including Otis Borror, Virginia Junkins and Elizabeth Ellifritz. He went there for seven years and later went on the graduate from Keyser High School in 1935.

Some of the greatest changes Kuykendall has seen during his lifetime were in farming. He recalled finding arrowheads when he farmed with horses.

Farming Rebel's Retreat, Kuykendall remembered the dairy herd and chickens. He said they made butter and would take the eggs to town each Saturday.

When Kuykendall was 10 years old they began shipping milk a business that continued until 1993.

He said that he started farming in the horse and buggy days and that it wasn't until the 1930 that they had their first tractor.

There are two barns; the first at Rebel's Retreat was built in 1899 followed by the red barn in 1950.

Another aspect of farming was the maple sugar camp in the ridge behind the farm.

Kuykendall said they had 300 buckets, half of which were wood.

"It was a lot of work, but it was a lot of fun too," he said as he described the process of tapping the trees and using a sled with a barrel to collect the water to be boiled into syrup.

They used 30 to 35 gallons of sap to make one gallon of syrup, which sold for $1.50.

On Valentine's Day in 1950, Kuykendall married Ann Cook. That fall they moved to their current home located a little farther down Patterson Creek Road.

Together they share three children William Robert, Don Michael and Carol Ann (Kuykendall) Junkins. They have one grandson Bill Junkins.

Reeses Mill was a busy place with the summer season bringing riding tournaments to the community.

Kuykendall said they had five horses including two teams and one for riding. Riding in the tournament was a challenge as riders carried a nine-foot long spear with a metal point used to spear rings.

"That separated the men from the boys," said Kuykendall, adding that the man the won the tournament crowned the queen.

The events drew participants from Hampshire, Hardy and Mineral County with as many as 30 riders competing in the event.

Kuykendall's brother Bob was known as the Knight of Rebel's Retreat, while he was the Knight of Sunnyside, named after his home place.

Kuykendall also recalled the construction of Route 46. He said it the road was completed in contracts. The first was from Keyser across the mountain and the second completed the road to Fort Ashby, the third contract was the completion of the bridge across Patterson Creek.

He said convicts were used on the road crew and they were housed at a barracks along Route 46 near Fountain. Kuykendall said his mother boarded some of the workers on the road.

An avid follower of politics, Kuykendall didn't think twice when he told members of the genealogy society that Harry Truman and Franklin Roosevelt were the best president's during his lifetime.

Living during the depression, he said was not a problem for him as a child. "We were all poor and didn't know it," he said.

The next meeting will be held at 6 p.m., April 14 at the Smith Funeral Home Burlington Chapel. Pat Bonar will present the program on the historic TM&P Railroad in Burlington.